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ABSTRACT

Part of a series designed to help community groups engage in discussion on the possibility of individual and community transformation, this discussion paper explores how education (both in schools and in community development programs) can help promote the wholeness of human beings. The need for the content and process of the curriculum to speak to every child at every stage of development so that he/she can develop or actualize his/her potential is considered. The symbol of the medicine wheel is examined to illustrate how separate entities, when seen in the light of the universe, are equal and necessary parts of a larger whole. The text is intended to be read aloud by the group facilitator with frequent pauses for discussion. It is accompanied by a reading list, activities, and discussion questions to review what has been learned, explore aspects of the discussion more fully, and apply what has been learned to one's own situation and community. (NEC)

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THE FOUR WORLDS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

ADULT EDUCATION SERIES

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DISCUSSION PAPER SIX

Towards a Vision of Human Possibility

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1984

The Four Worlds Development Project is the result of many people's efforts and wisdom. Some were directly involved, others inspired us through their work in education and alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

Direction for this project was set at a conference held in Lethbridge, Alberta in December, 1982. Participants at the conference were native elders, spiritual leaders and professionals of various native communities in North America. Their contributions were framed by their deep commitment to native people and their own, often hard won, experience. To each of them we offer our deepest respect and appreciation.

Harold Belmont
 Mark Belmont
 Andy Black Water
 Ed Calf Robe
 Steve Courchene
 Ricki Devlon
 Tyrone Eagle Bear
 Perry Fontaine
 Leonard George
 Cindy Ginnish
 George Good Striker
 Rufus Good Striker
 Woodrow Good Striker
 Ed Heavy Shields
 Peter Heffernan
 Lionel Kinunwa
 Germaine Kinunwa
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 John Many Chiefs
 Sandy Many Chiefs
 Jon Metric
 Allan Murray
 Wilson Okeymaw
 Lee Piper
 Doreen Rabbit
 Chuck Ross
 Jerry Saddle Back
 Herman Sovka
 Eric Tootoosis
 Mike White
 Rose Yellow Feet

Editorial note:

In English it is impossible to refer to a person without using a pronoun that indicates gender or sex (e.g. he or she, him or her, his or hers). Since there is no special word to refer to a person whose gender is not known, most writers have chosen to use the masculine form in these situations.

This custom of using the masculine form when referring to a person who is not known to be a female, has caused a conspicuous absence of reference to women in English writing.

Thus all of the great ideas and discoveries discussed in English literature are expressed in masculine terms and the reader constantly visualizes males, rather than females, as active participators in the world. Our society's tendency to devalue the role and contributions of women is only augmented by this lack of picturing women in an active creative role.

The Four Worlds Development Project has chosen to alternate the use of feminine and masculine pronouns whenever the reference is unspecific. This choice of usage is a deliberate one to avoid the the awkwardness of the compound form (he/she; him or her) while at the same time acknowledging the harmful consequences of bowing to a convention that persistently forces its audience to visualize the world as dominated by men and operating on ideas expressed in masculine terms.

Introduction

This series of discussion papers has been especially designed for small community groups; we call these "core groups". Our aim is that as people learn more about themselves and their community, they will want to get involved in creating new options, new patterns of personal and community dynamics, and in short, in promoting the ongoing process of human development in themselves and their community.

The core of anything is the heart and center of that thing. The core of a human development process is the people who, by their unity of vision, their personal commitment to growth and their leadership (by example) form the pattern around which other people cluster as positive changes take place in the community.

The Four Worlds Project promotes the development of core groups which will engage in discussion on the possibility of individual and community transformation, and conduct action-oriented research on aspects of personal and community life. It is anticipated that this group will, in some sense, establish new structural patterns around which the life of the community can organize itself--patterns that are more life-preserving, life-enhancing and development-promoting than those currently being utilized.

The core group, as it gains clarity of vision and takes action on that vision, will attract others who will also participate in the learning-transformation process. The fundamental strategic problem is not whether core groups can have such an influence. That they can is an established fact in a wide variety of case studies on social change. The challenge is twofold. The first problem is to tease out of obscurity and isolation in any community of learners those individuals who are in some way already facilitators of the organic change process in the community. The second task is to unite the hearts of these individuals in a common vision of human possibility that transcends social and political barriers to positive understanding and collaboration.

It is with the goal of helping individuals and communities face these two challenges that this discussion series was prepared. Accept them as your own and use them in whatever way you feel will be appropriate and effective.

We envision a process in which a group facilitator helps the group go through the text together, stopping frequently to discuss the points that are made. The activities and discussion questions can be used to help review what has been learned, to explore some aspects of the discussion more fully, and to apply what you have learned to your own situation and community. Much of the material can be read aloud (either by the facilitator or by various members of the

study group in turn) so that people are not limited by their reading ability in their efforts to understand the material. We anticipate that a natural outcome of this discussion process will be that the group will decide to take action in the community.

This series is just an experiment. It is not meant to be a final product. Let us know what you think, what you liked and what you didn't, and what helped you learn and what didn't. During the next year we hope to develop a set of video tapes to go with the series and maybe produce some more discussion papers to develop some of the ideas further. We need you to help us make this project a success.

The medicine wheel is the very Way of Life of the People. It is an Understanding of the Universe. It is the Way given to the Peace Chiefs, our Teachers, and by them to us. The Medicine Wheel is everything of the People.

The Medicine Wheel is the Living Flame of the Lodges, and the Great Shield of Truth written in the Sign of the Water. It is the Heart and the Mind. It is the Song of the Earth. It is the Star-Fire and the Painted Drum seen only in the Eyes of Children. It is the Red Pipe of the Buffalo Gift smoked in the Sacred Mountains, and it is the Four Arrows of the People's Lodge. It is our Sun Dance.

The Medicine Wheel begins with the Touching of our Brothers and Sisters. Next it speaks to us of the Touching of the world around us, the animals, trees, grasses and all the other living things. Finally it Teaches us to Sing the Song of the World, and in this way to become Whole People.

Hyemeyohsts Storm (Northern Cheyenne)

Let us think again about how education (both in schools and in community development programs) can help promote the wholeness of human beings. We have learned that it is impossible for any enterprise to promote human well-being unless it has a clear vision of what a human being is, and how a state of well-being comes about. It might be useful for you to go back to Discussion Paper Four, "The Transforming Power of a New Vision", and review it before you go on to the rest of this topic.

If we want to develop human potential, we need to have a vision of what that potential might be and how it unfolds. It is this fundamental vision that has been missing from most health and education related efforts in Native communities.

Growth as a Series of Births

A complete picture of human beings must recognize that development from conception to death is an evolutionary process in which biological, psychological, cognitive and spiritual potentiality are translated into actuality. It is a process in which the human spirit gradually gains mastery over its bodily instrument. This process is, in the truest sense, emergent. Just as physical birth is literally an emergence terminating the period of fetal development and releasing the child into an entirely new phase of development, so other less obvious births occur at intervals

in what may be called a series of further births.

As each new birth actualizes a new human capacity that before existed only in embryonic (or potential) form, it also introduces a new phase of development in which a still further germinal capacity (or potential) is launched into an embryonic growth stage. For example, a child develops ears, eyes, arms and legs while in the womb. These limbs and senses are not very useful in the womb, but they are preparing the child to be able to develop his potential once he is born. The growth of ears, eyes, arms and legs help create the potential for further development once the child enters his next stage of growth.

The creation of further potential is itself one of man's potentialities. The capacity to perpetually move beyond herself makes the human an organism capable of endless expression of an unlimited and developing potential.

Our Needs Change as we Grow

For education to accomplish its goal of helping children develop or actualize their potential, the content and process of the curriculum must speak to the child at every stage of development. In the normal course of development, these stages occur at roughly the same ages in all children, thereby making it possible to identify in a general way, the

In the Indian way of life, the traditional life, there was a time for growing up. At each stage of life, there was no rushing: you did not skip. You had to go from this stage to the next one and on to the next one, and there was no way of getting around it. There was no short cut.

Today, with such emphasis on education--and I think Indian children are going through the same thing as non-Indian children--there is a strong push to get your child in the pre-primary, primary and first grades and start him off reading and doing things that are actually beyond his years. The Indians feel that each stage is crucial and that the child should be allowed to dwell in each for the appropriate period of time so that every aspect of his being can evolve, just as a plant evolves in the proper time and sequence of the seasons. Otherwise, the child never has the chance to master himself in any one phase of his life.

Allen Quetone (Kiowa)

"whats" and "hows" of learning for each age or grade and to determine when remedial intervention may be required. The children will not have to search themselves to discover what their needs are. These needs will have been anticipated by the teacher's insight.

Educational practices must be founded upon this insight into the changing interplay of body, emotion and intellect in the different periods of the child's development. Three broad periods of roughly seven years each can be identified. In the first of these periods there is a predominance of physical activity, outwardly manifest in the body's swift growth and the will to motion. In the second, which ends in puberty, there is a predominance of feeling or soul, manifest in the child's new capacity for aesthetic experience. The third stage ends at about age twenty-one, the age of "majority". This stage shows a predominance of the intellect or spirit, manifest in the abstract thinking and independent judgment of which the child is now capable.

Developmental and brain theories support the ideas that children have wholly different needs at different ages and that the entire way they perceive and understand their environment evolves as they grow through identifiable stages.

The reference section at the end of this topic lists a number of books that go into detail about these theories. Especially useful are the work of Jean Piaget and Joseph

Chilton Pearce, especially the latter's book entitled Magical Child.

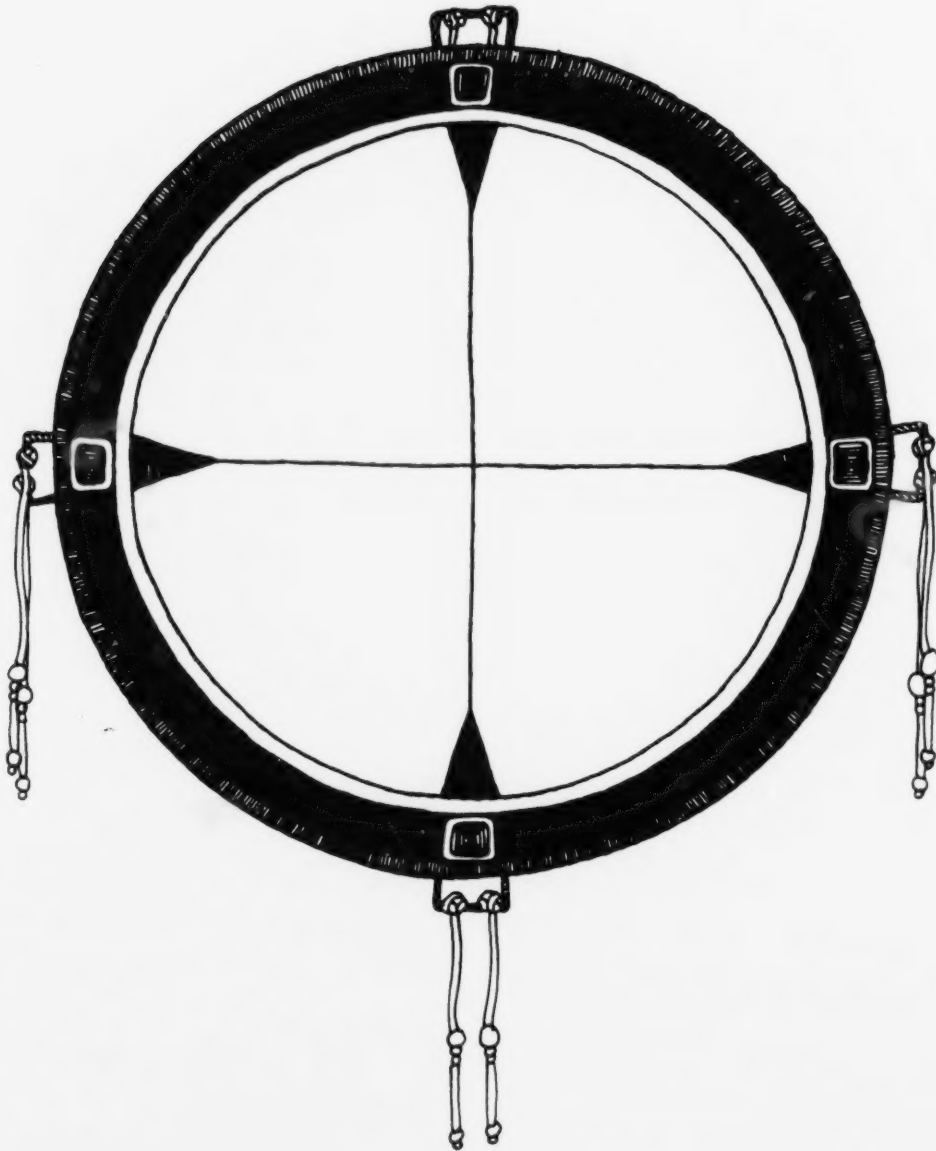
Toward a Complete Picture of Human Beings

To help us understand more clearly what a human being is, we can use the ancient symbol of the medicine wheel. It is an ancient symbol used by almost all the native people of North and South America. There are many different ways this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g. behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us "see" or understand things we can't see with our physical eyes because they are ideas and not physical objects.

In many ways this Circle, the Medicine Wheel, can best be understood if you think of it as a mirror in which everything is reflected. "The Universe is the Mirror of the People," the old Teachers tell us, "and each person is a Mirror to every other person."

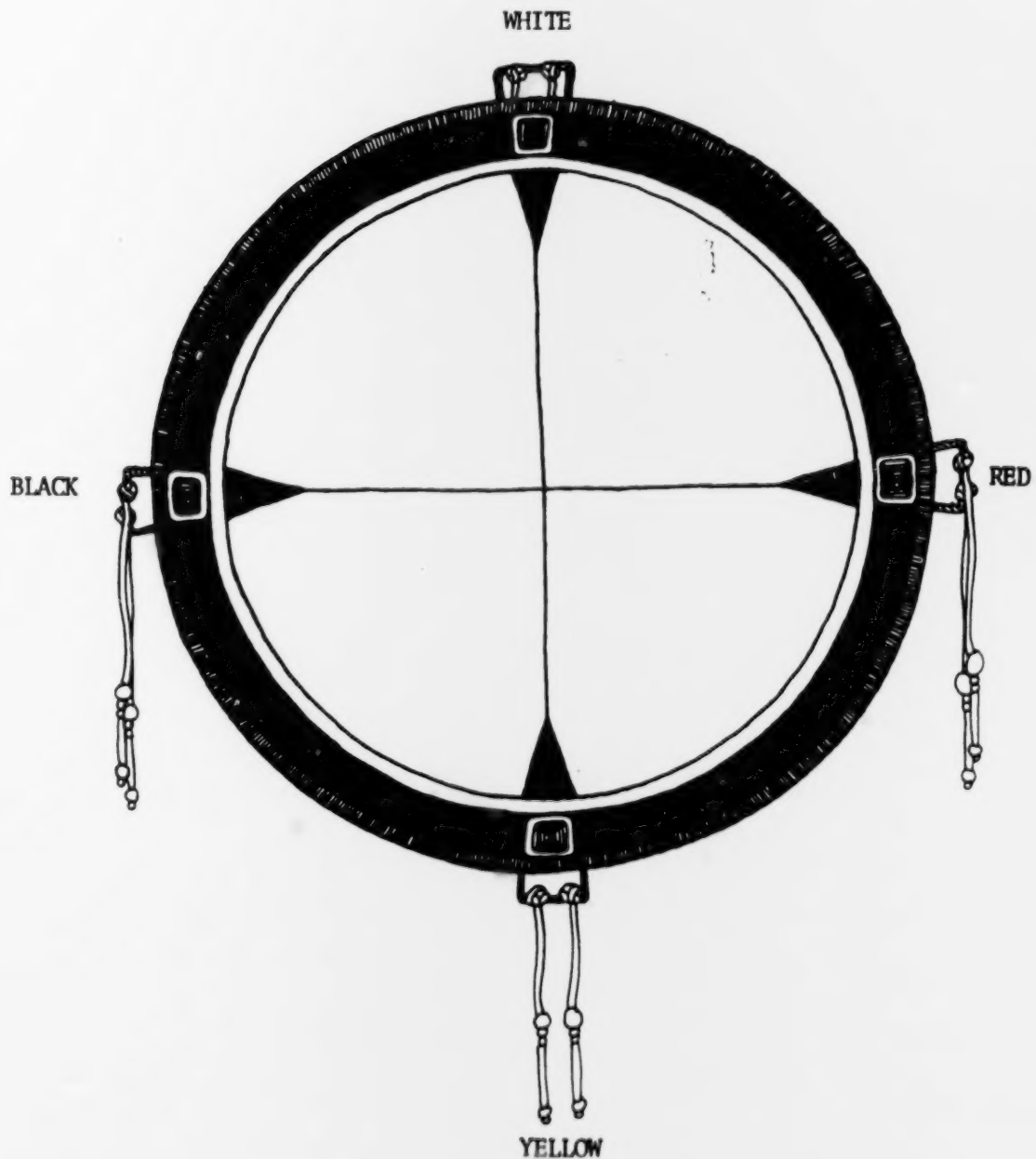
Hyemeyohsts Storm (Northern Cheyenne)

The medicine wheel is basically a circle with the four cardinal (or compass) points marked on it.

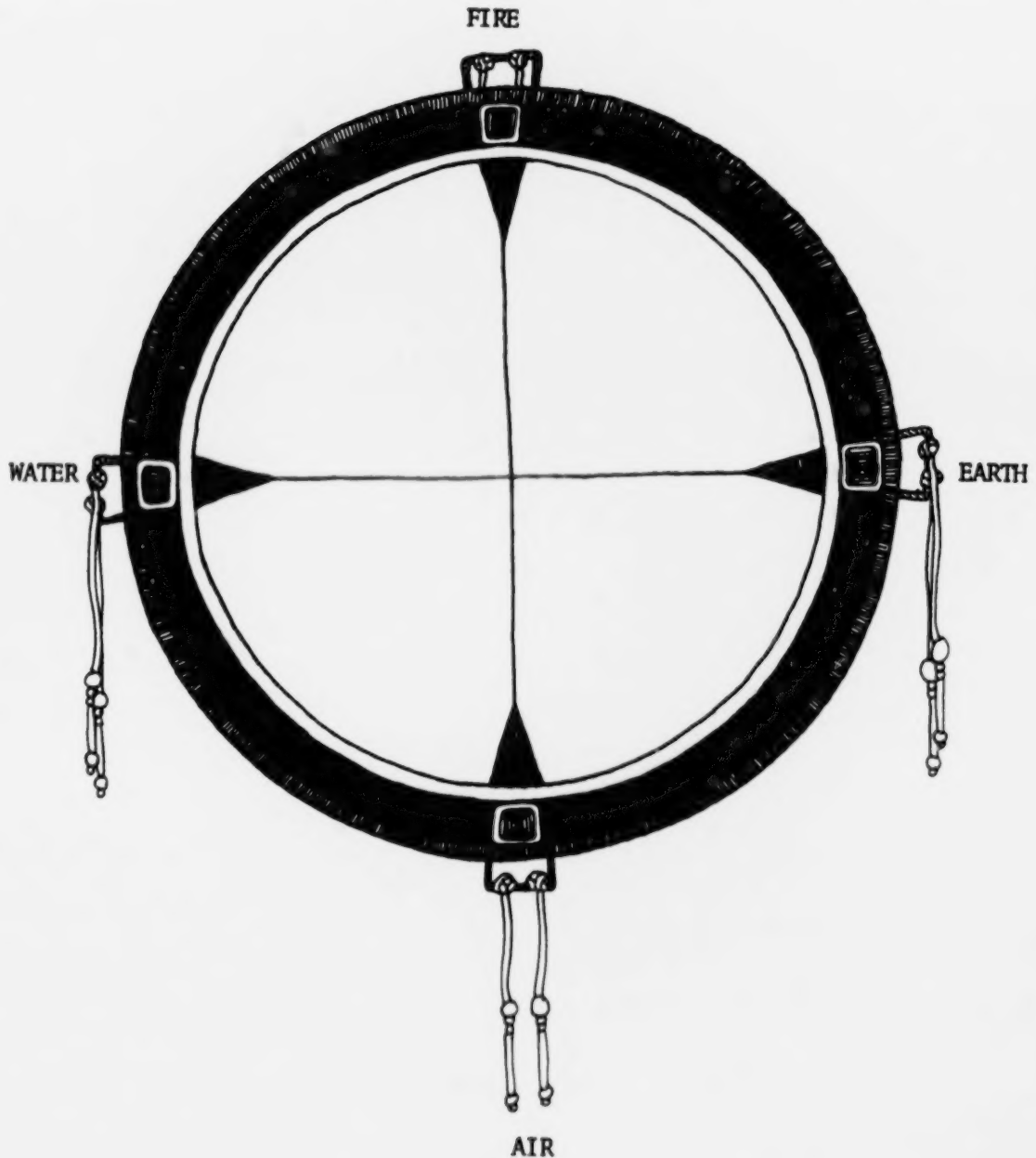


It has been used as a metaphor to describe many ideas:

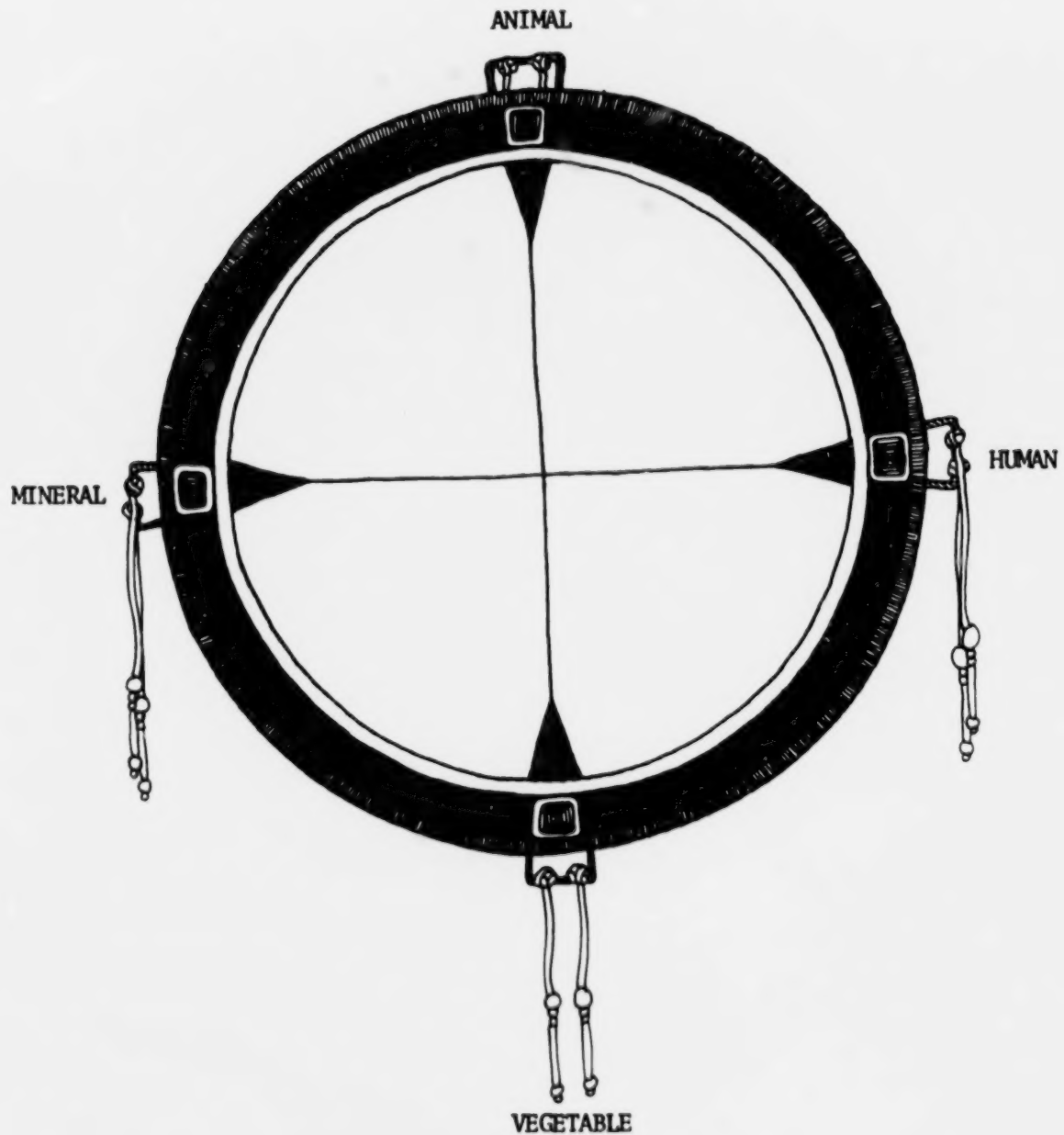
1. that the four symbolic races (black, red, white and yellow) are really part of one human family;



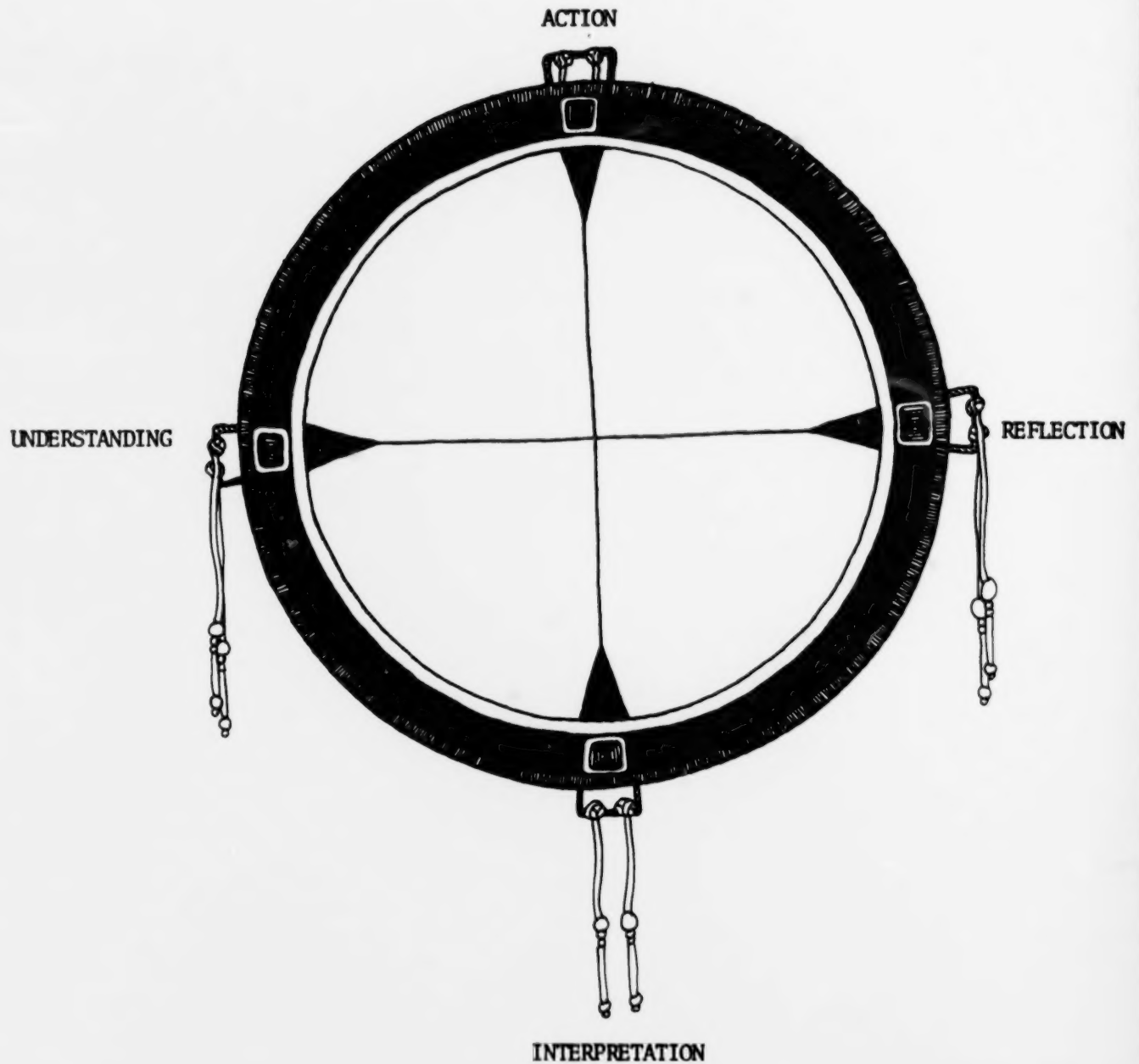
2. that the four elements (water, air, fire and earth) each so distinctive and powerful, are all part of the physical world and that they must be respected equally for their gift of life;



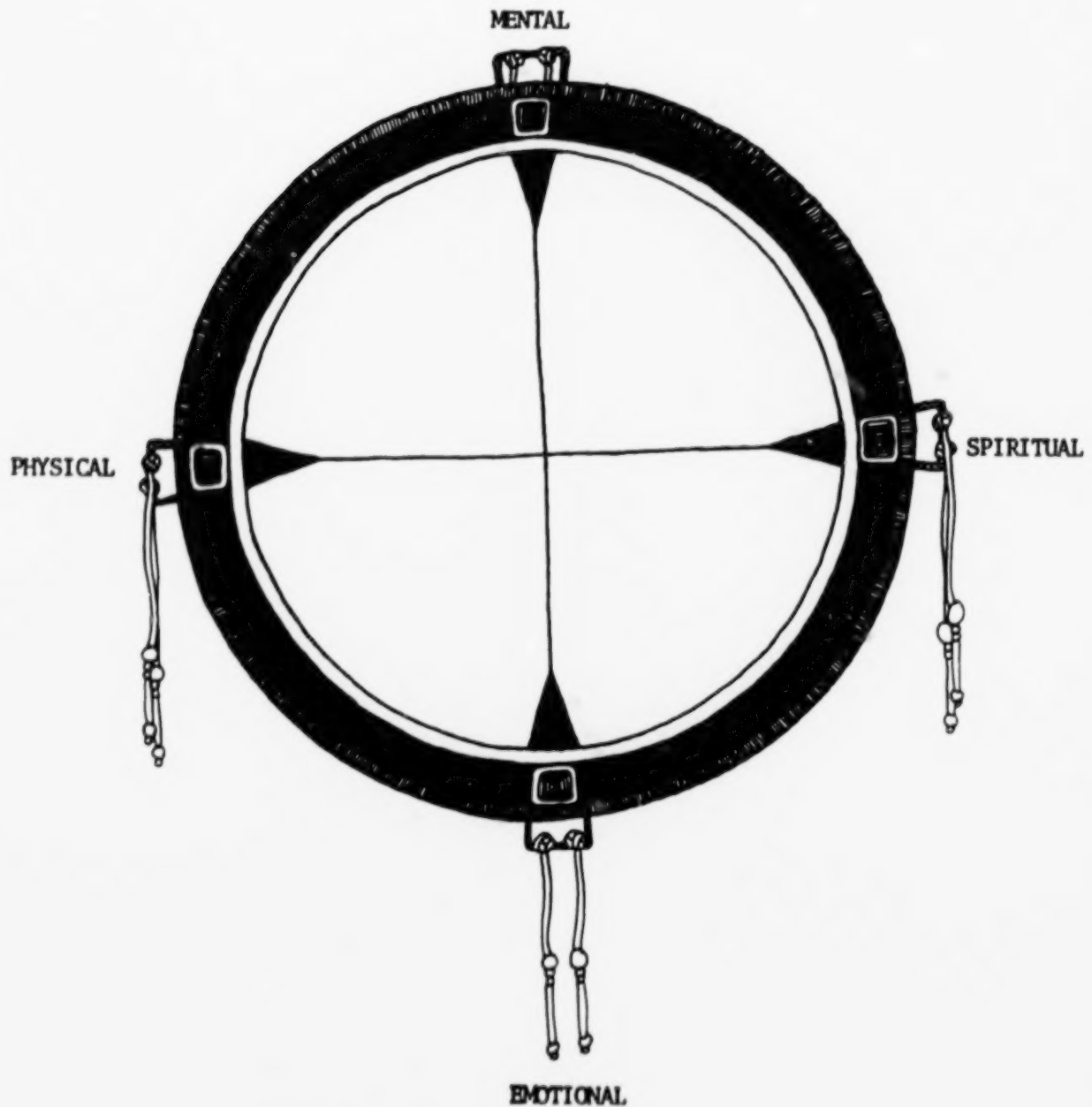
3. that the four worlds of existence (the mineral, vegetable, animal and human worlds), are all bound together in the unity of the spirit;



4. that the four dimensions of human knowing (action, reflection, interpretation and understanding) are mediated at the intersection of these activities by the world-shaping power of belief and vision;



5. that the four dimensions of human potentiality (the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) all converge at the intersection within us, known as the human will or volition.



There are of course, many more sets of four which we have not named and which fit within this analytical framework. Indeed there are many that remain to be discovered. But it is easy to see that the medicine wheel has far-reaching explanatory powers. The great lesson of the medicine wheel is always that separate entities, when seen in the light of the universe, are equal and necessary parts of a larger whole. It brings out the ancient teaching of the inter-connectedness of all things and the principle that each part must give up considering itself the centre of the universe in order to achieve balance or harmony within the whole.

In subsequent discussion papers we will use the symbol of the medicine wheel to explore more fully the four essential aspects of each human being (the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) and the capacity that we all have to grow and develop our potential in each of these areas.

Questions to think about:

1. Most educational programs base their idea of what human beings can do on what they have done in the past. How is this approach different from the idea presented in this topic that man has unlimited potential and that each new development makes further growth possible?
2. What are the traditional teachings of your tribe concerning the potential of human beings to grow and develop? What do these teachings say are the factors that make such growth and development possible?
3. Is the medicine wheel a part of the traditions of your people? Which lessons or truths are taught with it?
4. How does your present education system help the development of the child in each of the four aspects of his being:
 - a) physical
 - b) mental
 - c) emotional
 - d) spiritual
5. How does your community life (the way people interact, the recreation programs, the government and band services) help community members develop in each of the four aspects of their lives:
 - a) physical,
 - b) mental,
 - c) emotional,
 - d) spiritual?

Reading List:

1. Morey, Sylvester M. and Olivia L. Gilliam (eds.). Respect for Life: The Traditional Upbringing of American Indian Children, Myrin Institute Books, New York, 1974.
2. Neihardt, John G. Black Elk Speaks, Washington Square Press, New York, 1959.
3. Pearce, Joseph chilton. Magical Child, Bantam Books, New York, 1977.
4. Piaget, Jean. The Construction of Reality in the Child, Ballantine Books, New York, 1954.
5. Storm, Hyemeyohsts. Seven Arrows, Ballantine Books, New York, 1972.
6. The Sacred Tree, a curriculum unit for high school students available from the Four Worlds Development Project, Faculty of Education, The University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1984.
7. Wholistic Educational Evaluation, a discussion paper available from the Four Worlds Development Project, Faculty of Education, The University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1984.